



Statement

The SNHR Holds an Online Event Entitled 'Advancing the Cause of Detainees and Forcibly Disappeared Persons Is Our Collective Responsibility' in Cooperation with the Truth and Justice Charter Organizations

On Friday, October 22, 2021, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) held an online event entitled 'Advancing the Cause of Detainees and Forcibly Disappeared Persons Is Our Collective Responsibility' in cooperation and coordination with the founders of the Truth and Justice Charter, with the participation of Ms. Fadwa Mahmoud, co-founder of the Families for Freedom movement, Ms. Maryam al Hallaq, Chairwoman of the Caesar Families Association, Mr. Ahmad Helmi, one of the founders of the Ta'afi Initiative, Mr. Diab Serriya, from the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison, Mr. Khalil al Haj Saleh, from the Massar organization (Coalition of Families of Persons Kidnapped by ISIS), and Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, Director of the Syrian Network for Human Rights.

The session, which was moderated by Ms. Amina Khoulani, a human rights activist and representative of the Families for Freedom movement, was broadcast on Zoom and social media platforms.

Ms. Amina Khouliani opened the session by talking about the centrality of the issue of arrest in Syria, especially since arrests and torture are still continuing on a daily basis. In regard to this phenomenon, she talked about the launch of the 'Truth and Justice Charter' by a group of victims' associations, saying: **"The charter constitutes a common umbrella for victims' organizations and their families, and is considered a road map that advances our vision and demands regarding the issue of detainees. It is also intended to be a reference and strategic vision available to all stakeholders, human rights organizations, policymakers and actor decision-makers involved in this issue."**

Ms. Khouliani then gave the floor to Mr. Diab Serriya, who referred to the issue of financial blackmail, to which the families of detainees are subjected in order to obtain information about their loved ones. Mr. Serriya said: **"We were shocked by the huge amount of money that these organized networks earn, including security men, army officers, shabiha, militias and their collaborators. There are lawyers and judges who are also involved in the blackmail of victims' families, who were only seeking information which is a legitimate right for them."**

In her address during the event, Ms. Fadwa Mahmoud indicated that arrest has been a standard practice of Syria's repressive regime for decades, and spoke about her experience, saying: **"I was arrested during the reign of Hafez al Assad and kept away from my children for two years; my son Maher was then seven years old, and he is now detained. I always say that I fear that my grandchildren will also be arrested in the future, and that is why we are working to end this system and this tyranny."**

Ms. Mahmoud added that families have a right to know the truth and obtain information about their missing children. She concluded: **"Sometimes I feel tired and frustrated, and I cry, as is the case with the rest of the Syrians, but I must continue to work, because our children desperately need us, and they desperately need a voice to say, "These are the ones who deserve life, not authoritarian regimes."**

The next speaker, Mr. Ahmad Helmi, described the state of frustration as a form of luxury, which currently has no place among Syrians, saying: **"We cannot lose hope and surrender to the disappearance of our detained sons in secret prisons. We cannot say that the detainees and the missing in prisons and detention centers, who were killed under torture, are gone! We cannot say it's over! We cannot say we can't move forward!"**

He added: **"We must call out with the loudest voice and put pressure on a daily and continuous basis on every party involved in decision-making."** Finally, he stressed: **"The issue of detainees and revealing their fate is the first priority, and it is possible to work on it regardless of the political file and progress in the negotiations, and for this we presented a solution to the international community; we want to establish an independent international mechanism that works to reveal the fate of the forcibly disappeared persons in Syria, to begin its work today, and to access all detention centers."**

The founder of the Caesar Families Association, Ms. Maryam al Hallaq, spoke about what she and countless other Syrian families like hers have suffered: **"I received the death certificate of my son, Ayham, and many Syrians received death certificates for their children, all of them [supposedly] died of cardiac and respiratory arrest, with these certificates not being credible, as some of those whose families had received their death certificates returned to them after a while."** She referred to the constant pain of loss and the constant waiting that families endure in light of their loved ones' absence: **"If the Caesar photos had not appeared, I and many families would have been waiting for all these years, and I always wonder if waiting and living in the hope of meeting is better than the disappointment and closing the door of hope."**

She added: **"I have the right to receive the remains of my son! We have the right to bury our loved ones in cemeteries!"** Ms. Maryam al Hallaq urged Syrians in the countries of asylum to advocate for the cause of detainees and torture victims in every available way.

Mr. Khalil al Haj Saleh spoke about the issue of those kidnapped by ISIS, pointing out that there are different challenges in this regard after the defeat of the ISIS organization. He said: **"We need a mechanism and a binding mandate to reveal the fate of all the forcibly disappeared persons, because this constitutes a real step to reach stability in Syria."**

This was followed by an address by Mr. Fadel Abdul Ghany, who began by saying: **"Advancing the cause of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons is our collective responsibility, and it is not only the responsibility of human rights organizations, but rather the responsibility of society, individuals, survivors and victims' families, as it is an integrated circle and must be at the very heart of the politicians' agenda; without the cooperation of the victims' families, it is impossible to build a documented database on which reports, advocacy procedures, and claims for compensation and reparations, etc."**

Mr. Abdul Ghany clarified that enforced disappearances and torture in Syria amount to crimes against humanity and have been going on continuously since the summer of 2011 to date, adding that while there's no shortage of data on these crimes or of mechanisms to deal with them, there is gross negligence in the implementation of these mechanisms: **"The failure of the international community over ten years to reveal the fate of even one detainee does not mean that we stop demanding a solution to the detainees' issue, because demanding accountability is our responsibility as survivors; compensation is a right for the victim, a right for his/her family, and a right for society as well; not to mention that the crime of arrest is ongoing up until this moment. Every month, there are additional numbers of detainees."**

Mr. Abdul Ghany presented a set of recommendations, which included:

- Efforts must be intensified to demand from friendly countries that there be no normalization of relations with the Syrian regime, which still holds at least 132,000 detainees or forcibly disappeared persons in its detention centers.
- The condemnation, pressure, and demand for sanctions must extend to the Syrian regime's allies, especially Russia and Iran, which provide the regime with all the means of survival, and therefore ensure that the regime does not feel that it needs to make any concessions.
- Syrian society should support the families of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, especially the forcibly displaced among them, because they are the most vulnerable and poor groups, and take into account that most of the detainees are men, which means that women have become the main breadwinner for their families, making women vulnerable to pressure and various forms of extortion.

- We at the Syrian Network for Human Rights always demand that one of the states of the world should adopt the file of detainees and forcibly disappeared persons, including the UN call for creating a mechanism to reveal the fate of the disappeared, and thus this state would be responsible for following up on the details of this file on the legal and human rights levels, providing aid and assistance to the families of the forcibly disappeared, helping with rehabilitation for survivors, especially women, and supporting civil society organizations working on this issue, most notably the organizations which founded the Truth and Justice Charter.
- Completely disassociating the issue of detainees from the Astana process, not politicizing this issue, and engaging in consultations with civil society organizations working in this file.

The entire event is available on our YouTube channel at [the following link](#), and on our Facebook page via [the following link](#).



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